

**Post-Event Summary Report
2005 White House Conference on Aging
Anchorage, Alaska Community Forum**

Name of Event: "The Future of Aging in Alaska" Anchorage Community Forum

Date of Event: Friday, April 22nd, 2005, 1:00 to 4:30 p.m.

Location of Event: Anchorage Senior Center in Anchorage, Alaska

Number of Persons Attending: 130

Sponsoring Organizations: Alaska Commission on Aging and Anchorage Senior Citizens Advisory Commission

Contact Name: MaryAnn VandeCastle

Telephone Number: (907) 465-4792

Email: MaryAnn.VandeCastle@health.state.ak.us

Event Format: Participants discussed four overall issues in small groups, then reported their top recommendations to the full group.

Note: Where multiple similar recommendations are listed, they represent priority suggestions of more than one small group.

Priority Issue #1: Health and Long-Term Care

Barrier #1: The current health care system is inefficient, excessively costly, and not equally available to all citizens.

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #1:

- The United States should provide universal health care for all.
- The U.S. government should provide health care coverage for all citizens.
- We need universal health care.
- The cost of medications must be lowered. There should be bargaining between Medicaid and pharmacies – U.S. citizens should not have to pay more than others.
- Provide universal coverage, eliminating advertising and other unnecessary costs.

Barrier #2: It's difficult to find out what care and services are available.

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #2:

- There should be a one-stop shopping spot for seniors to get information about the services that are available.
- Sustainability should be provided for Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) in the United States.
- An information source outside of computer technology is needed for the many seniors who don't use computers.
- Have a senior citizens cable TV channel that carries information about available services.
- We need to do a better job of educating the public on using nurse practitioners and physician's assistants.
- There is too much information on medications. Use information technology to consolidate and simplify this information so people can more easily learn how to take care of themselves.
- We need greater education of caregivers and patients.

Barrier #3: Needed facilities or care delivery modes are lacking, or require improvement.

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #3:

- Provide a specialized medical care facility for seniors.
- Create a hospice facility in Anchorage with trained staff.
- A one-stop center is needed for medical tests.
- Better training is needed for staff in Anchorage health care facilities.

- Create a process to encourage private enterprise to build facilities for continuity of care – assisted living, etc.
- Deliver some services to seniors' homes.

Barrier #4: *Federal medical care programs are problematic.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #4:

- Take a better look at Medicaid overcharges.
- Medicaid billing/codes are difficult to understand.
- Many doctors won't take Medicare/Medicaid patients. This needs to be addressed.

Barrier #5: *There is insufficient local control of aging resources.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #5:

- There should be local control of money and resources through an Area Agency on Aging.

Barrier #6: *Lawmakers are not adequately attuned to the needs of seniors.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #6:

- Legislators must be pressured to assimilate older Alaskans into the (law-making) process.

Priority Issue #2: Financial Security

Barrier #1: *Potential changes to the Social Security system are the source of anxiety.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #1:

- There should be no privatization of Social Security. Make the government pay back what it took from the fund in the 1980s with interest.
- Raise the cap on the Social Security payroll tax.
- Do not privatize Social Security.
- If they want to REFORM something, they should direct that "reform energy" to creating universal health care.
- Raise payroll deduction limits.
- Eliminate the cap on payroll taxes to help fund Social Security.
- NO privatization for Social Security.
- People need to hear the truth about privatization – that it is voluntary, that it only involves 4% of one's Social Security account.
- Safeguard Social Security.
- Don't privatize Social Security.
- Remove the cap on the Social Security tax for employees.
- Allow people to open a private investment account with 4% of their Social Security.
- No privatization of Social Security – it's too big a gamble.
- Seniors should make more noise about not wanting Social Security privatization.
- Don't transfer any more Social Security trust funds to the general fund.
- No privatization.
- Pro-rate Social Security benefits against private retirement benefits.
- The majority of this small group were against privatization.
- Privatization is not viable.
- Remove the cap on payroll taxes.
- Canada's privatization of their Social Security system failed.
- Remove the cap on the Social Security tax.

Barrier #2: *Seniors and all citizens need more information about financial choices.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #2:

- People need better information – better financial education from the very beginning.
- Start teaching about financial security in grammar school.
- Offer free counseling for seniors regarding financial decisions.
- There should be courses in schools about handling personal finance.
- Hold financial seminars for seniors.
- Inform people about Miller trusts.
- Provide financial education in the schools.

Barrier #3: Seniors are unfairly burdened by taxes.

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #3:

- There should be a flat tax.
- Create a flat tax rate.
- Do not deduct Social Security taxes for older workers.
- There should be no deductions for Social Security on pensions or other income for seniors.
- Social Security payments should not be taxed.
- Increase the senior property tax exemption for Anchorage.
- Lower workers compensation rates so providers can hire more staff.

Barrier #4: Seniors often have difficulty finding jobs.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #4:

- Provide government incentives for hiring older workers.
- Provide education on age discrimination for employers.
- Have the U.S. stop outsourcing jobs.
- Increase employment opportunities across the age spectrum. People need full-time work with health benefits.
- Point out to employers the benefits of senior employees.
- Provide continuing job training for seniors and incentives for employers to retain seniors.
- Offer tax breaks to employers for hiring seniors.

Barrier #5: Seniors are often prime targets for financial fraud.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #5:

- Alert banks and seniors about fraudulent schemes that may be out there.
- The federal government should protect seniors against identity theft.
- Create public service announcements advising seniors to hang up the phone on anyone seeking private data.
- Stop letting insurance companies defraud seniors by denying claims.
- Expose fraud.

Barrier #6: The chaos in the health care system creates financial stress and uncertainty for seniors.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #6:

- Place a cap on what people must pay for catastrophic medical costs.
- Charge reasonable rates for long-term care.
- Create a type of "Peace Corps" of retired medical personnel to work with seniors.
- Provide universal health coverage.

Barrier #7: Politicians aren't listening to what seniors need.

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #7:

- Pressure Senators and Representatives to represent seniors, not special interest groups.
- Change the governor AND the president!
- Many government programs are NOT user-friendly; this wastes millions of dollars.

Barrier #8: People don't save enough money for retirement.

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #8:

- Encourage employees to invest in IRAs.
- Encourage more savings by paying more interest.

Priority Issue #3: Community Resources

Barrier #1: Seniors often lack the basic elements that would allow them to feel a part of a stable community.

Proposed Solutions for Barrier #1:

- Transportation, affordable housing, and in-home care are lacking.
- Make sure housing is included as a community resource – public housing, subsidized housing, availability of reverse mortgages. Educate the building industry on creating senior-friendly environments.
- There should be a combination of public and private housing. Subsidized housing in private buildings should be a possibility.

- Good, reliable public transportation should be available for seniors and their helpers.
- Cultural education regarding non-English-speaking people needs to be funded, as well as translators to help employers, doctors, etc.
- Neighbors should watch out for neighbors, and call for help if a senior is in distress.
- Offer positive aging education and intergenerational programs to encourage younger generations to interact with seniors and be aware of their needs.
- Look into construction contracts for housing – are we getting all the senior housing we need?
- Long-term care insurance should provide more home care.
- Better accessibility is needed in public buildings, especially the Anchorage Performing Arts Center.

Barrier #2: *Seniors often don't know where to find information about available services; the media is not utilized optimally for reaching out to seniors.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #2:

- Set aside a senior citizens time on public television and radio.
- Make better use of radio and television to disseminate information to seniors about available services.
- Seniors need a more centralized source of information about available services and support systems.
- Have caseworkers available to coordinate services.

Barrier #3: *The energy, experience, and insight of seniors is often not utilized by communities.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #3:

- Create a CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) type program for seniors.
- Expand the RSVP program (retired senior volunteers).
- Hire seniors to provide some of the senior services needed - but don't tax their pay.

Barrier #4: *A shortage of service workers impacts seniors who need assistance.*

Proposed Solutions for Barrier #4:

- There is a shortage of paid service workers – money has been cut off by the state. Someone must pay for them to do the job. Their training should be paid for as well.
- Start a vocational training program for elderly services through Job Corps.
- There should be better pay and education for senior service workers. Many of them also need help with language skills.

Barrier #5: *Health care costs and provider shortages have a detrimental effect on seniors and their families.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #5:

- Use a CCC/Peace Corps/Public Health model – pay for students' medical education, then require 4-8 years of service to alleviate the shortage of doctors.
- We need a mindset change regarding Alzheimers – currently divorce or planned impoverishment are the only choices when a spouse develops this disease. Long-term care costs more than \$6,000 per month.
- The senseless competition between agencies should be questioned – if there were more cooperation among agencies, we'd get more for our dollar.

Barrier #6: *Many people are unaware of seniors' unmet needs.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #6:

- Seniors need to be more active in drawing attention to what is lacking.

Priority Issue #4: Social Well-being

Barrier #1: *Seniors need encouragement to maintain an upbeat attitude and daily activity.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #1:

- Adopt a "take it as it comes" attitude rather than being pessimistic.
- Exercise every day.
- Maintain a positive attitude. Look forward to your life.
- Set goals!
- Keep moving if you want to be moving!
- Have something to look forward to every day.

Barrier #2: *Seniors often can't get to the community activities they are interested in.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #2:

- Transportation affects everything. Use volunteers.
- There needs to be adequate transportation available so that seniors feel less of a loss if they must stop driving.
- Suggest that churches use their buses to transport seniors to the senior center and other activities.
- Ensure that the elderly have a way to get out into the community every day – this includes transportation and winter maintenance of streets, sidewalks, parking lots, etc.
- Transportation is lacking in the community.
- Transportation is needed if seniors are to participate in social activities.

Barrier #3: *Some seniors need to polish their driving skills so that they can continue to drive longer.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #3:

- Take safe driving courses through RSVP, etc.
- Examine older drivers more often than every ten years.
- Require more frequent driver testing of seniors.
- Take the AARP driver course.
- There needs to be more public awareness of the 55-Alive driving course for seniors.

Barrier #4: *Seniors need to seek out and become involved in community activities.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #4:

- Seniors should join organizations to make community connections.
- Seek the companionship of people your own age.
- The Anchorage Senior Center has great facilities – get the word out so more people can take advantage of it.
- Churches could take a more active part in creating senior programs; these could be combined with youth programs.
- PAY volunteers (to encourage volunteering and boost seniors' pocketbooks and self-esteem).

Barrier #5: *Negative public perceptions of seniors need to be changed.*

Proposed Solution(s) for Barrier #5:

- Stop bureaucrats from assuming that people over 65 are deaf, dumb and half-witted.
- Other community members need a more positive perception of seniors. A page in the paper weekly, a TV show, etc. could help to demonstrate seniors' positive contributions to the community. Seniors are a valuable asset!
- The Longevity Bonus was a way to acknowledge the contributions of seniors.

Barrier #6: *Community members need to respect seniors' autonomy.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #6:

- Require that someone on the Borough Assembly be a senior.
- Let seniors make their own decisions regarding whether or not to participate in an activity.
- Don't preach to seniors.

Barrier #7: *Seniors have trouble finding a live person to answer their questions and help them find the services and activities they are seeking.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #7:

- There needs to be a senior issues hotline or clearinghouse with appropriate PERSONAL follow-up.

Barrier #8: *Some desperately needed services are unavailable to Alaskan families.*

Proposed Solution(s) to Barrier #8:

- We are the last state in the nation where Alzheimer's does NOT open the door to Medicaid funding. A person must have multiple other disorders needing skilled nursing care. They can't get PCA, chore, etc. services otherwise.